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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RIYADH 002501

SIPDIS

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DEPT. PLEASE PASS TO NSC FOR NRAMCHAND, S/CT FOR EINGALLS,  
INR FOR SMOFFAT/AALRAHIM, IRF FOR AGOMBIS, DRL/NESCA FOR  
JLIEBERMAN, AND NEA/ARP FOR DAS  
GGRAY/ASTEINFELD/RJACHIM/SRAMESH.

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [CVIS](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI GRAND MUFTI CALLS FOR TERRORISTS TO BE  
PUBLICLY CRUCIFIED

REF: A. RIYADH 2080

[1](#)B. RIYADH 2049

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Saudi Interior Ministry announced on November 28 the arrest of 208 suspected terrorists. The Saudi Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Alsheikh declared two days later during his Friday November 30 sermon (translated text attached) that deviant groups are corrupting the land and those guilty of corrupting the land should be subjected to "had al harraba", an Islamic punishment that can include public crucifixion. Al-AlSheikh warned Saudis against the dangers of extremism, condemning those who sympathize with al-Qaeda and advising Saudi youth to "stay on the straight path." Several papers published articles and op-eds on the sermon, including a front page, above the fold article in the December 1 edition of the widely-read pan-Arab daily al-Sharq al-Awsat. A SAG official noted that the Grand Mufti's focus on the political crime of "al harraba" (or spreading corruption) was unusual for a Friday sermon and may indicate that public crucifixion is likely for the ringleaders of the terror cells. Most Embassy contacts viewed the sermon as another chapter in Saudi Arabia's ideological war on terrorism. While this may not be the first time that the Grand Mufti has advocated "had al harraba" to extremists, Post considers the sermon to be another example of the ruling family's commitment to fighting terrorism. On the heels of the Grand Mufti's October 1 fatwa against Saudi foreign fighters (reftels), clearly the Al-Saud believe that society will back them as they encourage religious leaders to publicly decry extremist ideology and call for harsh measures to protect Saudi society. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) The Interior Ministry announced on November 28 the arrest over the past few months of 208 suspected terrorists, who had been plotting to attack an oil installation in the Eastern Province and assassinate prominent Islamic scholars and security figures. Saudi Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Alsheikh decried the foiled terrorist plots during his November 30 "khutba" or Friday sermon at the Turki bin Abdullah mosque in central Riyadh. According to the December 1 edition of as-Sharq al-Awsat, the Grand Mufti declared that individuals who espouse "takfiri" or extremist ideology are evil and should be subjected to an Islamic punishment for severe crimes known as "had al harraba." Based on Sura 5, verses 33-34 of the Qur'an, this punishment could involve exile, amputation of an individual's hand and opposite foot, beheading, or publicly crucifying the beheaded body. According to the as-Sharq al-Awsat article, the Grand Mufti warned Saudis against the dangers of extremism,

condemning "any attempt to sympathize with al-Qaeda" and advising Saudi youth to "be aware of the plotters... and not heed the views of the misguided." Op-eds in the December 1 and 2 editions of the liberal al-Watan concurred with the Grand Mufti's sermon and called for "had al harraba" against Saudis and foreigners engaged in terrorism. The December 6 edition of the Saudi Gazette stated that the Grand Mufti was one of the prime targets of the arrested terrorists.

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SERMON CONNECTS TERRORISM TO CRUCIFIXION IMPLICITLY  
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13. (C) Contacts at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call, and Guidance (MOIA) transcribed the Grand Mufti's sermon from a taped recording and shared the text with the Embassy. The translated sermon (see paragraph seven) consists of two parts -- first an overview of his general points and second a focused discussion of his main point. The first part includes typical references to the oneness of God, the five pillars of Islam, and the necessity of "had" (a form of Islamic punishment) to protect Muslim society from criminal acts. In addition to stealing and alcohol consumption, the Grand Mufti comments on the necessity of "had al harraba" or punishment for spreading corruption in the land. The second part speaks at length about people who "have gone astray," "who are no longer able to discern right from wrong," and "who spread corruption on earth." The Grand Mufti refers to the recent capture of the terrorists by noting "with God's grace and guidance, the specialized authorities were able to catch them before their poison was released and their plans were aborted by the security men with God's help." He also alludes to "the sons who deviated from the straight path" or the 7th century Islamic heretical

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groups, known as Kharijites. In summary, the sermon states in the first part that "had al harraba" is a necessary punishment for those who spread corruption and then denounces in the second part the deviant groups that spread corruption, which lays the groundwork for justifying the crucifixion of terrorists.

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SAG OFFICIAL BELIEVES THAT PUBLIC CRUCIFIXION IS LIKELY  
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14. (C) MOIA Assistant Deputy Minister for Islamic Affairs Dr. Abdullah al-Leheedan commented to PolOff on December 2 that it "may have been the first time" that the Grand Mufti openly called for "had al harraba" against terrorists, but he was not surprised by the language. He noted the Grand Mufti's implicit connection of terrorism to this punishment, as opposed to the media's more blunt rendering. He added that it was "unusual" that a political crime like "harraba" (or spreading corruption) was mentioned alongside more mundane vices like adultery. He noted that the exact punishment would depend on the severity of the crime. Therefore, beheading and public display of the body (or crucifixion) was likely for the ringleaders of the terrorist cells. Finally, he remarked that "had al harraba" is not uncommon, citing the examples of the 1979 execution of the leaders of the raid on the Mecca mosque, the 1990s execution of "Rashash," a Riyadh-based gang leader, and the 2006 execution of a Bangladeshi murderer.

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MOST SAUDIS CONSIDER SERMON TO BE PART OF THE WAR ON TERROR  
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15. (C) With the exception of a liberal writer who found the sermon to be unusual, most Embassy contacts found the sermon to be another page in the SAG's ideological war on terrorism. A conservative member of the Riyadh Municipal Council told PolOff on December 1 that "Islam includes national security," so any threats against national security must be addressed by

a person of the Grand Mufti's stature. He added that the sermon was "not significant," because the Grand Mufti made similar comments after the 2003 Riyadh bombings. A liberal Shi'a intellectual told PolOff on December 2 that the sermon was merely lipservice to satisfy Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin Abdul Aziz. He noted that the Grand Mufti is compensated well by the Al-Saud, so the scholar's words are carefully scripted to match the regime's message. A former Shari'a judge and now prominent lawyer told PolOff on December 9 that the Grand Mufti made similar statements after previous terrorist attacks based on the "whispering" of the royal family. He ruefully noted that "had al harraba" is a very flexible punishment, which can be arbitrarily applied by "each of the country's 800 judges." He noted the range of possible punishments from exile (interpreted to be imprisonment in modern times) to public crucifixion, which is usually reserved for "very public murders that challenge the government." He added that the sermon itself did not hold as much weight or influence as a collective decision of the entire Council of Senior Ulema, which the Grand Mufti chairs.

16. (C) COMMENT: While this may not be the first time that the Grand Mufti has advocated for "had al harraba" against extremists, the sermon and the related front page, above the fold article in as-Sharq al-Awsat clearly demonstrate the ruling family's influence over the religious establishment and commitment to fighting terrorism. This sermon is a sign of the regime's self-confidence; they are not hedging their bets. On the heels of the Grand Mufti's October 1 fatwa against Saudi foreign fighters (reftels), it is evident that the Al-Saud believe that society will back them as they encourage religious leaders to publicly decry extremist ideology and advocate for such a harsh form of punishment for extremists. Considering that the Grand Mufti himself was one of the main targets, the Al-Saud know the value of continued cooperation with and co-optation of mainstream clerics and scholars to decry takfiri ideology. END COMMENT.

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PARTIAL TEXT OF THE GRAND MUFTI'S SERMON  
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17. (C) Below is the Embassy's English translation of parts of the Grand Mufti's November 30 sermon.

BEGIN TEXT

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EXCERPTS OF THE FIRST PART:

O Muslims, God's blessings to us are great... There is nothing besides Islam besides going astray... Worshipping must be for God alone.... God did not create in you love for shrines and graves of the dead, or ask third persons to mediate between you and God...Monotheism must be adhered to... Those who deviate from the straight path are those who worship living and dead people... Duties of Islam, including praying, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage, must be adhered to... God has endowed you with legitimate sources of income...(so there is no need) for lying, cheating, hypocrisy, or criminal activities to earn money...

Thank God that he prevented forbidden things for the welfare of man and society, such as adultery and being unfair to people's blood, money, and honor... Muslims should be brothers to Muslims. They should not beguile or be unfair to each other. They should protect society from disintegration and deviation...

To protect Muslim society, God has legalized various punishments for serious crimes... For stealing, there is cutting the hand of the thief. Drinking alcohol will spoil your mind...

He has required the imposition of "had al harraba" against

the corruptors, the violators of security, and those who spread corruption on earth, so that society will be safe from the evil, injustice, and corruption of these people.

O Muslims, God is merciful.

FULL TEXT OF THE SECOND PART:

Abundant and blessed praise be to Allah.

O Mankind do your duty to your Lord full.

Servants of God, God has bestowed on us great blessings and goodness. This blessed country enjoys great blessings: the Islamic shari'a, established security, abundant sustenance, unity, and comfort. All these blessings are enjoyed by Muslims in this country and their brother residents where they are secure in their souls, properties, chastity, and lives.

We live in this blessed country along with residents from other Muslim countries in security and stability and enjoy great blessings. Each one of us plays his role and performs his duty with peace of mind secure in his soul, money, and dignity.

O Muslims, some people, we seek refuge in God, have turned upside down, they lost their heads and became like animals unable to distinguish between rightness and falsehood. "They are only like cattle. Nay, they are worse astray in their path." (Sura 25, Verse 44)

Some people have gone astray, not knowing where they are turning to. Those, we seek refuge in God, a group whose insight became blurred, and their eyes blind -- no longer able to discern right from wrong. They became mere tools in the hands of the enemies who move them and manipulate them as they please.

This Muslim country receives every year millions of Hajj pilgrims and Umra performers, who find peace and stability in the two holy mosques.

But, while we seek refuge in God, the enemies would not rest in peace while they see our blessings. They have no comfort as they envy those who have received God's blessings and goods.

Enemies are known as enemies, but the disaster is that some who are counted as Muslims and call themselves Muslims try to harm Muslims and spread corruption on earth without any vision of thought.

Where is the faith that deters these crimes? Where is the faith that deters these crimes?

True faith makes one protect the blood, souls, and money of

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Muslims.

This blessed country is envied by the enemies for being a Muslim country applying the rule of God. Shari'a courts are established and their rules are applied. They envy our security and the connection between the people and their ruler.

They envy our security and our blessings. This country went through one hundred years of blessings, security, stability, and prosperity, where its entire people united in one heart cooperating for goodness and piety. They envy us for all of our blessings.

O Muslim Youth,

I advise you to be pious and vigilant against the wickedness of the wicked and to not listen to the views of the deviants and aggressors who want harm and plagues for the nation. Stay on the straight path. Your enemies want no good for you, but they want to steal your blessings.

They want chaos in the lands of Muslims. They want to violate dignity and steal money. But the "sustainer is ever on the watch," but "in the end such evil scheming will only engulf none but its authors."

O Muslim,

What have we heard and read of the mislead group that deviated from the straight path and went astray from the correct road, while claiming Islam is far from Islam?

The true Muslim would not commit any act that harms the nation in its present or future and would not accept corruption or harm of the nation. The believer loves for his brothers what he loves for himself and hates for others what he hates from himself.

Those who cooperate with the enemies are to be considered criminals, deviants, corrupt, and lost.

O Muslim,

The whole Muslim society should have a united stand against those who spread corruption in the land. We should not approve or support criminals, nor have compassion for them or hide them or give them any consideration. The Muslim should know that they are a criminal deviant group that wants to spread corruption in the land.

However, with God's grace and guidance, the specialized authorities were able to catch them before their poison was released and their plans were aborted by the security men with God's help. May God guide them and support them.

The security of the nation is an important matter that should be guarded by every Muslim, in order to stop the deviant groups that want to harm Muslims, afflict evil on them, spread corruption on earth, and allow the enemies to interfere in Muslim countries. This is the intention of the enemies whether the doers know this or not.

Muslims should be concerned for their countries. The Muslim lands were not occupied, nor were their economic and political entities destroyed except by the hands of their sons who deviated from the straight path. The enemies employed such groups to execute their plans and achieve their desires. Let us be vigilant against the corrupters. Let us hold tight to our religion and obedience to our ruler and pray for God's support. You should know that the responsibility of protecting the nation is a form of a holy war and fulfillment of our duties. May God guide our leaders to what He loves and be pleased with and protect us from the envy and viciousness of the vicious.

END TEXT.

FRAKER